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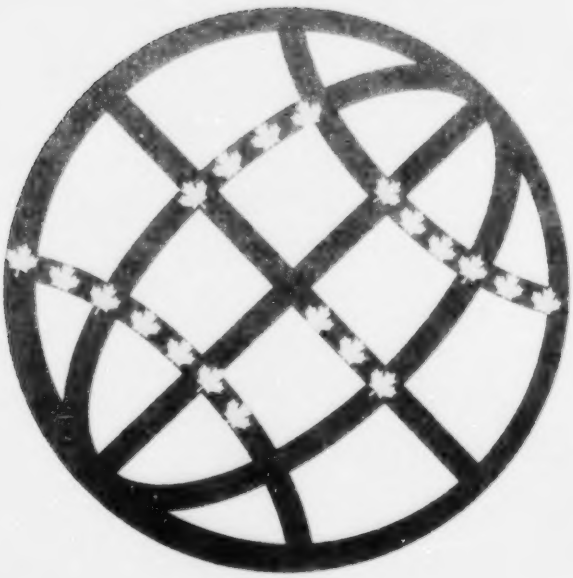

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101-00621/

THE ILLEGAL PROLIFERATION AND MISUSE OF LIGHT WEAPONS AND SMALL ARMS

The Ottawa Working Group

THE OTTAWA WORKING GROUP

THE ILLEGAL PROLIFERATION AND MISUSE OF LIGHT WEAPONS AND SMALL ARMS

In Attendance: Chris Smith, Christophe Carle, David Meddings, Wendy Cukier, Tariq Rauf, Paddy Rawlinson, Michael Hallowes, Jen Smith

Background and Context

The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development invited Chris Smith to bring together a multidisciplinary group of experts on issues relating to the illegal proliferation and misuse of light weapons and small arms. The intention behind the meeting was to offer the group the opportunity to discuss innovative approaches to the problems created by and related to light weapons proliferation.

The common understanding amongst the group is that we are unequivocally supportive of the recent surge in interest by NGOs, certain foreign governments and security analysts in light weapons proliferation and the misuse of firearms. In this spirit, we are cautious of a significant and serious lacuna, namely the near non-existence of a research culture and a robust paradigm which can assist in the further developments and understanding of what is becoming a most critical security issue in the late twentieth century. Through this working group we hope to make s significant contribution to the development of a research culture which addresses a set of issues which have emerged since the end of the Cold War. This would seem to be a useful and necessary collaboration between a multidisciplinary group of academics and those groups and organisations involved in advocacy and policy formulation. At the same time however we recognise that these issues are immensely complex which means that we are very much at the start of the formulation of a research framework which we hope to be able to refine over the coming months.

We deliberately worked from a very elementary and simple agenda. Our intention was to give colleagues from different disciplines and research traditions the space to develop and articulate their own ideas on an accepted problem. Therefore, yesterday's agenda covered three aspects of the light weapons proliferation problem namely causes, effects and solutions.

Causes

Our discussion led us to consider two main areas, the first concerned the strength/weakness of the state which amounted to three categories; the collapsed state, states on the *at risk register* and functioning states. In addition we looked at two main drivers which exacerbated both supply and demand; socio-economic conditions, the growing culture of violence across the board. Further work should lead to the development of an interesting matrix.

In weak and failed states it has become increasingly difficult for the security forces to maintain control over force and violence. Both during and after conflicts large numbers of weapons have been lost to non-state actors including for example militant political groups and organised crime syndicates. There is also a major flaw in the way in which peace support operations focus upon problems pertaining to weapons. Too few are collected and almost none are decommissioned. We also recognised in all states the problem of social exclusion and the implications of the privatisation of security. Increasingly violence is seen as a means of solving differences and redressing inequalities. Where the state is weak or non-existent there is a strong demand for illegal weapons for self-defence.

We also believe that relatively strong and legitimate states have a growing illegal weapons problem which has yet to be sufficiently recognised by the light weapons community. One of the most important drivers is the growing culture of violence. In addition, within the European Union, for example, some ethnic communities are being infiltrated by criminals with military training. Although it is more difficult to smuggle weapons into the European Union when this does occur there is a growing trend toward the militarilisation of crime ß witness the use of RPGs to force entry into ATMs. There is also a growing concern that motorcycle gangs are becoming more organised and are seeking sophisticated and highly capable weapons of war. Because strong states have more effective security forces there is less demand for weapons that cannot be concealed, such as assault rifles. However, there is a growing demand for pistols and for smaller machine guns such as the Uzi. This is not yet a major security problem but the situation needs to be monitored with care. Moreover, as the European Union expands and its borders reach the Balkan states and Russia opportunities for arms smuggling will inevitably increase. We also believe that it will be extraordinarily difficult to control illegal flows of weapons from the former Soviet Union and certain ex-Warsaw Pact countries, such as Bulgaria. If for some reason patterns of demand should change for the worse, light weapons proliferation could emerge as a major European security issue. We are also aware that in Europe and elsewhere weapons travel with people and their causes. Weak and failed states provide a near risk free conduit for arms traffickers. For example, illegal weapons are moving from the former Yugoslavia into Europe via Albania ß Greece and Crete in particular is a well documented destination. In North America the problem is as much about the more misuse of illegal weapons, both military and civilian. Firearms stolen from legal owners represent a thriving grey market whereas the wholly illegal market tends to be firmly tied to the drug trade.

In weak and failed states the dynamics are very different. We accept that in regions such as southern Africa governments and NGOs are fully aware of the scale and nature of the problem. We also believe that it is only a matter of time before organisations traditionally disinterested in security issues come to recognise the need to address the underlying causes of illegal weapons proliferation. In the case of weak states the availability and misuse of weapons can lead directly and indirectly to state failure. Once a state has failed, a complex political emergency becomes especially difficult to address when weapons are available to criminals, militants and as well, those concerned for their personal safety when domestic security structures have collapsed. Often weak and failed states are further affected by a strong gun culture which may legitimise the private ownership of light weapons which were originally procured for the exclusive use of the security forces. In some cases such as South Africa we identified a strong action reaction

syndrome whereby legal gun ownership increases dramatically when individuals fear the threat from individuals armed with illegal weapons of war. Finally, across the board there is a growing trend towards the use of weapons of war and military tactics in routine crime such as hold-ups.

We recognise that there is a need for the research community to desegregate and classify the causes of both illegal weapons proliferation and the misuse of weapons. This is a task which we will address over the coming months. We also discussed briefly the impact of media reporting relating to the misuse of weapons. It may be the case that the CNN factor leads not to a growing concern but instead to compassion fatigue and a tendency to accept all aspects of the problem as inevitable.

Effects

Over the course of our research we have all encountered disparate examples of the tragic effect of the misuse of powerful weapons. These range from the financial, physiological and psychological effect of those injured by, say, a bullet from an AK47 which, due to their high velocity, can fragment and tumble thereby creating profound injuries with long lasting effects. In South America for example 13% of GNP on average is absorbed by the various costs of violence and injury. We also identified the varied impact upon urban centres. Rising crime using illegal weapons of war can quickly lead to the flight of both people and capital with significant results.

The availability and misuse of illegal weapons cannot be divorced from trends in crime and policing. In many parts of the world police forces are severely underpaid and over-stretched and individual policemen/women are more threatened and less secure than even before. We questioned whether or not a long-term effect might be to change the already limited appeal of policing as a profession. This might also exacerbate the trend toward the privatisation of security which we agreed would be unwelcome and fraught with problems and complications if the state monopoly of force were to become oligopolies. Another salient effect is the increased financial cost of policing which would limit the ability of the state to reward or compensate for increased risk and insecurity. We recognise that police pay is crucial to minimise police corruption, especially on and around borders, and to guarantee professionalism and efficiency. We also recognised the compelling need to either preserve or nurture policing by consent which can easily be a major casualty when the security forces are faced with the need to deal with criminals etc. who might be far better armed than themselves.

It is important to identify additional effects of the misuse of weapons particularly those which once belonged to the security forces. Communal conflicts and ethnic hostilities can be deepened and dramatically exacerbated through an increase in fatalities and in especially severe injuries. Thus, conflict resolution and peace building will be made all the more difficult once sophisticated weapons come into play. We thought that the ongoing ethnic conflict in Karachi provided a useful case study.

Illegal light weapons proliferation is emerging as one of the most serious security issues in the

post bipolar international environment. We recognise the impact and effects on all the areas to which our various disciplines relate – public health, law enforcement, regional and national security and the rise and rise of organised crime. The list of effects is extremely long and varied. Once again we feel that it would be helpful to categorise the effects through the development of a matrix which would link the categories of states mentioned earlier to the issues and areas which concern us most. Without doubt, there is a need here to provide clarification and structure.

Solutions

We are all fully aware of the various solutions currently under consideration. These include for example weapons buy-back and amnesty programmes, close control over ammunition and 'macro solutions' designed to increase the availability of entitlements and thereby reduce the demand for illegal weapons. Throughout this stage of our discussions a number of more esoteric ideas came to the surface such as the legalisation/licensing of illegal weapons (which is actually happening in Southern Albania) the 'coke bottle deposit' and the trade-in approach and the prospect – albeit uncertain – by introducing increased obsolescence into the light weapons R and D. On the latter question we questioned whether or not the development of ammunition designed to jam an automatic weapons thereby making it unusable, would risk maiming or even killing the user.

One of the most interesting aspects of this discussion was our agreement that when, as individuals, we come to consider solutions we automatically retreat inside our respective disciplines. It is essential that each future consideration of solutions is informed to a greatest extent possible by a multi-disciplinary approach. We were also aware of a tendency to dwell, perhaps unduly, on micro solutions. Although there is much work here to be completed, the observation that patterns of demand will only change when individuals see fewer reasons to seek ownership of an illegal weapon means that in no small part overall solutions will be socio-economic in nature rather than legal and punitive. Furthermore, this discussion brought home to us the fact that the light weapons issue is not just about weapons, it is far greater in scope and in depth than we feel has been accepted thus far. We also questioned whether or not those concerned about light weapons proliferation might have much to gain from a closer interaction with crime prevention people. Perhaps in some instances wheels are being reinvented. We concluded that diverse communities with a common interest in the control and misuse of weapons should be encouraged to work together and communicate with each other to the greatest extent possible.

In conclusion we recognise that robust policies for the control and elimination of illegal weapons cannot be manufactured out of thin air and *ad hoc* ideas. We all suffer from a real shortage of empirical data upon which to base analysis and action. We are faced with huge knowledge/data gaps which we accept cannot be totally filled because of the nature of the subject but there is a pressing need to bolster our thinking about light weapons proliferation with better data, research and analysis. Conceivably this is not really a question of data being unavailable. It may be the case that we are simply failing to communicate with members of the

security forces, especially the police, who would be pleased to share sanitised information sources with researchers and NGOs. In part, because the arms control community is close to the forefront there is a underlying suspicions that the state will fail to cooperate fully when responding to requests for data. In many cases, however, the research and advocacy communities have more in common with the security forces on these issues than perhaps they realise.

This section of the discussion prompted us to consider to what extent we are hostage to our individual disciplines and methodologies. Perhaps what we need is to nurture the development of an entirely new research culture which would dissolve the boundaries which currently separate for example, arms control, development and criminology. It could well be the task of the next research generation to begin this process assisted by governments and international organisations which are currently seeking advice and direction. Meanwhile, there is much that can be done from the existing diversity of academic and intellectual resources. We urgently require the development of research and information gathering projects which will permit the analysis required to prevent the whole area from becoming static and circular.

Finally, we all agreed that the day's discourse had been fascinating, informative and extremely complex. We appreciate enormously having been given the opportunity to spend quality time in group discussion rather than snatched conversations on the conference circuit and so on. We will not at a stroke be able to develop the type of robust framework which we all accept is now required. However, we do believe that this has been a step in the right direction.